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ABSTRACT

In studying urban schools, researchers have identified several critical curriculum issues related to the miseducation and alienation of African American students. This paper looks at three such issues: the disconnection between the school curriculum and African American students' cultural backgrounds and environments (e.g., black dialect versus standard English); the lack of attention by teachers to the non-school versus the in-school curriculum (there must be a child-centered curriculum that views and values children's experiences outside the classroom as relevant inside the classroom); and the absence of students' voices in the classroom (in a democratic society, student's perspectives must be a critical element in curriculum design). The paper also examines a video documentary made by African American students at a Chicago charter high school that examined the community surrounding the school, focusing on racism, police brutality, economic isolation, and gentrification. The paper discusses video documentaries as one example of how these persistent curricular challenges might be addressed. Finally, it looks at video documentary more broadly as an alternative form of qualitative research. (Contains 54 references.) (SM)

Abstract

The Classroom and the Community: African American Youth Speak Out

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Paper Presented at the AERA annual conference in Seattle, Washington, April 2001

In studying urban schools, researchers have identified several critical curriculum issues related to the miseducation and alienation of African-American students. In this paper, the authors take a look at three of these issues: the disconnection between the school curriculum and African-American students' cultural backgrounds and environments; the lack of attention by teachers to the "non-school curriculum;" and the absence of students' voices in school classrooms. They also examine a video documentary made by African-American students at a Chicago charter high school, and discuss it as one example of how these persistent curricular challenges might be addressed. Finally, they discuss video documentary more broadly as a form of qualitative research.

The Classroom and the Community: African American Youth Speak Out

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In studying urban schools, researchers have identified several critical curriculum issues related to the miseducation and alienation of African-American students. In this paper, we will take a look at three of these issues that we feel are in particular need of being addressed: the disconnection between the school curriculum and African-American students' cultural backgrounds and environments; the lack of attention by teachers to the "non-school curriculum;" and the absence of students' voices in school classrooms. We will then examine a video documentary made by African-American students at a Chicago charter high school, and discuss it as one example of how these persistent curricular challenges might be addressed. Finally, we will discuss video documentary more broadly as a form of qualitative research, and briefly outline a video documentary research project we hope to undertake in the near future.

Living in the cracks: Disconnection between the in-school curriculum and students' cultural backgrounds and environments

> Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed.
>
> (Freire, 1998, p.75)

The duality of the lives of African-American students is present in the ringing of every school bell. Each school day represents the shedding of one face and the application of another as students leave parts of their cultural selves on the playground to embark on the endless journey of assimilation, i.e., the learning of the "proper way of speaking and being" (based on euro-centric models) in American society. They soon learn that the manner in which they speak at home is not acceptable because it is not standard or proper English (Perry and Delpit, 1998). They learn that the cultural practices that are present in their lives are not the "norm;" therefore, they become disconnected from their learning experience (Woodson, 1933; Delpit, 1995; and Ladson-Billings, 1994 and 1998; and Foster, 1995) . Oftentimes this leads to a fragmented self, as students are faced with the paradox of their schooled identity not being appropriate at

home and in social situations and likewise, their cultural selves not being acceptable at school (Fine, 1986; Fordham, 1988; and Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Thus, they live in the cracks between who they are and who society says that they are supposed to be. African-American students soon learn that in order to survive in both of these worlds, they have to learn to code switch, "move with facility between African American language and a standard form of English....role switching between school and home" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 219).

But what happens to their perceptions of self when the goal of American schooling basically equates to unlearning and/or the negation of the cultural ways of their people? How do we respond to the claims that what it means to be "educated" for blacks is the renouncement of culture (Asante, 1987 and Ogbu, 1978 and 1995)?, As one theorists states, "another price paid by the recipient of an education, and this is the personal cost of the process of deculturalisation, or de-Africanisation, whereby all personal expressions of one's original African culture are eliminated and [Euro-American] codes established instead....The price of a good education, a [Euro-American] education, in short, was and still is, the denial of one's Black cultural identity (Evans, 1988, p. 185).

African-American curricularists on curriculum

The education of African-American people has been a central point of inquiry in African-American Thought for over one hundred years. From the early years after the abolition of slavery, black intellectuals have been deliberating over the impact that education and schooling has had on the social predicaments in which African-Americans find themselves (Watkins, 2001; Crummell, 1885; DuBois, 1953, and Woodson, 1933). The curriculum or content of that education is of tantamount importance because it molds conceptions and thoughts of self and the world around. It is key to the struggle of African-Americans because education is the means through which many believe that liberation will come. As a result, the raising of critical consciousness must necessarily come through literature and learning experiences that incite political awareness and activism. Without a curriculum that breeds this vigor towards racial upliftment and enlightenment, African-Americans will continue to be marginalized and oppressed in this society in the same manner that Paulo Freire describes in Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

As a result of curriculum or educational content being the foundation of liberation for blacks, many African-American curricularists such as Woodson, Dubois, Hilliard, Watkins and others view the euro-centric model of curriculum through this lens. The following are critiques of the American school curriculum: 1) it devalues or excludes the cultural experiences of African-Americans, thus perpetuating the thought that African-American culture is inferior to European culture 2) it teaches African-Americans to be docile, not to become critical thinkers, and seeks to make them satisfied with the status quo 3) and it does not teach social consciousness or political activism. These very issues are explored by Carter G. Woodson in The Miseducation of Negro as he offers his sentiments on the curriculum taught to blacks:

> It was well understood that if by the teaching of history the white man could be further assured of his superiority and the Negro could be made to feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary the freedman, then, would still be a slave. If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.
>
> (Woodson, 1933, pp. 84-85)

Thus, a curriculum in which African-Americans are absent or depicted as inferior, gives birth to people who are oppressed in thought and action. Unfortunately, black theorists today would argue that not much has changed about the curriculum since those times; Asa Hilliard writes:

> ...dominating populations crush or suppress the history of their victims, destroy the practice of the culture of their victims, prevent the victims from coming to understand themselves as part of a cultural family [fostering disconnections], teach systematically the ideology of white supremacy, control the socialization process, control the accumulation of wealth, and perform segregation and apartheid....No attempt to remedy problems in education can occur apart from and understanding of these things....
>
> (Hilliard, 2001, p.25)

Therefore, the curriculum is politicized in African-American Thought and must necessarily address the historical plight that African-Americans have faced in this country, bringing about a political awareness and consciousness that will arm black youth with the knowledge needed to transcend the margins in which they find themselves.

Voices of African-American students

We hear the voices of black intellectuals and teachers speaking out on the devaluation or negation of the African-American cultural experience and those voices are so loud and clear that we may fail to hear the voices of the students who are the "men-in-situation." It is almost as if this marginalization and exclusion is happening to a group of unconscious people; however, nothing could be further from the truth. Students, even at the elementary level, are aware of the absence of their culture and the devaluation of it. As this exchange among two sixth grade students in Ladson-Billings' research shows:

> Second student: Yeah, but you know how they're always talkin' about great things from Europe and how all these white people did so many great things, but you never hear about the great things from Africa. They talk about Egypt but they talk about it like it's not Africa.
>
> Lewis: Why do you think that's so?
>
> Second student: Well, because everybody can see the great things the Egyptians did, like the pyramids, so then if you just talk about Egypt maybe people won't think about it as a part of Africa.
>
> Third student: What does that prove?
>
> Second student: I didn't say it proved anything. I'm just sayin' that if you make people think of the Egyptians as white then you will think that only white people can make great things.
>
> (Ladson Billings, 1994, p.85-86)

In this interaction, we see the political consciousness and social awareness that most black curricularists want to foster in African-American youth -- consciousness that understands the social context in which they are living and equips them to interrogate what they are being taught and the motivations behind those teachings. As the second student states, the motivations are negative and aimed at distorting and controlling African-American students' perceptions of self, "You will think that only white people can make great things." These are the reflections of a twelve-year-old and it is encouraging to know that he has these critical thinking skills. He echoes the sentiments of Carter G. Woodson more than sixty years ago:

> In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum....No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian. You might study the history as it was offered in our system from the

> elementary school throughout the university, and you would never hear Africa mentioned except in the negative.
>
> (Woodson, 1933, p.21)

The disheartening part is that this is still the case decades later and it bellows the exclamation that changes in the American school curriculum and its representations or lack thereof of people of African descent is occurring in slow motion, while the negative impact of the eurocentric curriculum is moving at warp speed as students struggle for academic achievement (Fine, 1986).

The curriculum that is taught to African-American students is not much different from that which was taught one hundred years ago. It is evident in the fact that many of the criticisms that black intellectuals of many, many years ago voiced about the American curriculum are echoed by curricularists today. The lack of continuity between the cultural experiences of people of African descent is recognized by educators and students alike; however, the void still remains. Though there is a movement toward culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy and an inclusive curriculum, there is more work to be done to make this a reality for all students of color. The need for culturally responsive educational experiences is being voiced—even by the students themselves. They are aware of their marginalization; they are aware of how the American curriculum is failing them, and they are speaking out about it. The more pressing question remains: Is anyone listening to them?

The in-school curriculum versus the non-school curriculum

In this section, we will discuss the components of both in-school and non-school curricula, and how teachers can draw from students' experiences outside of class to engage children in learning in the school setting. The in-school curriculum consists of overt, hidden, and null curricula, as well as extracurricular activities. The non-school curriculum refers to the experiences that promote learning outside of school (Schubert, 1997).

First, the overt curriculum refers to that which is explicitly taught. In public schools, overt curricula are developed based upon national, state and/or local standards which are organized by subject matter. For example, Illinois has developed academic standards for English language arts, mathematics,

science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign language (Illinois State Board of Education, 2001).

In the urban classroom, teachers use a variety of modalities to foster their curriculum including traditional and progressive learning activities. In addition to maintaining records, participating in parent conferences, attending staff meetings, and performing school duties, educators have twelve instructional functions (Haberman, 1996). These include "giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers, (and) giving grades" (Haberman, 1996, p. 119).

Taken together, these functions as they are enacted in urban public schools serving children of the poor constitute what Haberman refers to as a "pedagogy of poverty" (1996, p. 119) undergirded by a "logic" that is explained in the following syllogisms:

1) Teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities.
2) Teachers are in charge and responsible. Students are those who still need to develop appropriate behavior. Therefore, when students follow teachers' direction, appropriate behavior is being taught and learned.
3) Students represent a wide-range of individual differences. Many students have handicapping conditions and lead debilitating home lives. Therefore, ranking of some sort is inevitable; some students will end up at the bottom of the class while others will finish at the top.
4) Basic skills are a prerequisite for learning and living. Students are not necessarily interested in basic skills. Therefore, directive pedagogy must be used to ensure that youngsters are compelled to learn their basic skills. (Haberman, 1996, p. 121)

We offer the following responses to the above syllogisms:

1) Teaching and learning may be experienced by both the teacher and student (Michie, 1999). It is problematic when a teacher is of the opinion that s/he has nothing else to learn or cannot learn from students. Teachers stop growing when they limit themselves in that manner. Students can teach educators about their worlds outside of class. By doing this, they let their teachers know what their needs and interests are. This can inform the teacher about how to engage students in learning by making it more meaningful to them. According to Spring, "By never engaging children in discussions about what they think, authoritarian parents and teachers prepare children to be unthinking objects of history" (1999, p. 149).
2) When teachers view a major portion of their work as having students follow directions, what they are doing, in effect, is teaching students to be followers, not critical thinkers. This, in turn, serves to prepare students for a labor force in which they are the workers instead of leaders of corporations (Anyon, 1997)

3) This syllogism lends itself to the "at-risk" labeling of students. If we think of our students from a deficit standpoint, it can lead to teaching less rather than more. (Delpit, 1995)

4) Directive pedagogy teaches children facts by rote instruction, an activity that neither inspires nor requires critical thinking or any interaction (questioning, etc.) with the concepts being learned. Regarding a phenomenon made popular by Max Stirner, Spring states, "Stirner refers to any thought that an individual cannot give up as a 'wheel in the head'...A wheel in the head controls individual will and uses the individual rather than being used by the individual (1999, p. 40)."

Second, within overt curricula are hidden curricula which include the impact of socialization on learning (Jackson, 1968) and what is conveyed by subtle messages from teachers as they model behavior. Consider the following:

- What do students learn when teachers only model authoritarian behavior? They learn to follow the lead of authority (which alone is not a negative phenomenon).
- What do students learn when silence is mandated as the only appropriate behavior? They learn to be passive recipients of knowledge.
- What do students learn when curricula revolve around the chapters in a book? They learn that textbooks are the main source for the acquisition of knowledge.
- What do students learn when teachers teach from a script? They learn that in teaching and learning there is no place for creativity.
- What do students learn when their voices are not considered in creating curricula? They learn that student voice is not valued in the creation of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula are limited to depictions of a dominant culture and the way in which that culture views the world? They learn to accept and value the dominant culture. According to Taxel, "...schools confer preeminence on the language forms, world views, ideological, historical, and cultural perspectives of the dominant social groups, thus legitimating – as logical, natural, and/or the result of merit – the power, prestige, and status of these groups in society" (2000, p. 302). According to Delpit (1995), invisibility is a problem in the curriculum. Students of color do not see themselves represented in the curriculum.
- What do students learn when curricula are void of popular culture? They learn that the interests of students are not taken into consideration in the development of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula provide limited or no consideration for multiple intelligences? They learn that the manner in which students acquire knowledge is expected to be the same for everyone, and that students who cannot learn in the same manner as others have deficits.
- What do students learn when the arts are relegated to the null curricula? They learn that art is not important.
- What do students learn when they have no say in how schools are run? They learn that school is a place where student voice is not valued.

(The above questions are rhetorical. The "answers" given represent our point of view, but are not intended to be definitive.)

Third, the null curriculum refers to that which is not taught (Eisner, 1979). When considering all that is not taught, though the following list is non-exhaustive, let us consider a few topics that might relate to a body of students (and could stand alone as classes or be incorporated into subject matter across the curriculum, but often are not):

- Alternative lifestyles
- The politics of race, class, and gender
- Economic independence and interdependence
- Building and maintaining good credit
- Parenting
- Careers
- Relationships
- Decision-making
- History from non-mainstream perspectives
- Dysfunctional families

Again, a lack of knowledge about students' worlds outside of school and the silencing of students' voices make it difficult for teachers to create curricula that speak to the needs and interests of students.

The null curriculum also pertains to "mainstream" subjects such as fine arts. Even though most states have a standard for fine arts, often art is either eliminated due to a lack of funding or minimally taught as a separate subject as opposed to being incorporated into the curriculum across content-area. The fact that fine arts are often the first subjects to be cut or minimized demonstrates to students that art is considered superfluous. According to Eisner:

> Perhaps the most important contribution that my immersion in the visual arts has made to my views of education is the realization that neither cognition nor epistemology can be adequately conceptualized if the contributions of the arts to these domains are neglected. Those of us professionally socialized in education, not to say the culture at large, have lived in a sea of assumptions about mind and knowledge that have marginalized the arts by putting them on the back burners of mind and understanding... Curricula in which the arts are absent or inadequately taught rob children of what they might otherwise become. (2000, pp. 37-42)

Fourth, extracurricular activities are a part of the in-school curriculum inasmuch as the school sponsors them and they usually take place within the school or on school grounds (Schubert, 1997).

Often these activities include sports, arts and crafts, club affiliations involving ethnic groups, drama, language, etc.

Although schools are considered to be traditional settings in which learning takes place, much of what children learn is picked up outside of school (Schubert, 1997). As previously stated, the non-school curriculum refers to experiences that promote learning outside of school. Sources of non-school curricula are families, peer relationships, communities, mass media, hobbies, jobs (for older children), and membership in organizations (Schubert, 1997).

Gonzalez' (1993) teacher research on the funds of knowledge is a good example of how teachers can discover a wealth of learning opportunities present in the homes and communities of their students. (Funds of knowledge refer to the many sources of knowledge that are present in the homes and communities of students.) In Gonzalez' study, a team of teachers went into the homes of some of their students to conduct ethnographic research. After which, they shared their findings with one another and a team of university researchers to collaborate on ways in which to incorporate the findings into activities for their curricula. In doing this, not only were they able to engage their students in meaningful learning activities, but they were also able to build a level of trust with students and their parents.

Entrance into students' homes and communities also informs teachers regarding the mores, traditions, family values, peer relationships, hobbies, jobs, mass media, and club affiliations of their students; all of which, are sources of learning, and aspects of each can be incorporated into learning activities in the in-school curriculum.

According to Delpit (1995):

1) Educators need to know about their students' lives outside of school to determine social context and know the students' strengths that are perhaps hidden in school activities.
2) A problem that educators who are not from the community in which they teach face is the problem of ignorance of community norms. This ignorance fosters the formation of mistaken images/perceptions of parents and students.
3) We have created institutions of isolation, and we need to connect the school with the home and community.

Miller (1993) advocates a child-centered curriculum in which children are viewed as individuals, and their experiences outside of the classroom are relevant inside of the classroom. Foster (1995) also advocates teaching the whole child. The student image that a teacher views in the classroom represents only a small portion of the total child. Awareness of the popular culture, mass media, home life, and communities that are a part of children's lives could serve to bridge the gap in both communication and knowledge. It could also pave the way to engaging students and making them active participants in learning, while enabling teachers to have a better understanding of the whole child.

The absence of student voice and alienation from the curriculum

Pedagogic research has long queried teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers, political leaders, and students to better understand the problems of cultural disconnection in the classroom and slow rates of learning in depressed urban areas, as indicated by national standardized tests (Anyon, 1997). But while researchers listen, analyze, and report what students are saying, there doesn't seem to be evidence of its general acceptance as consequential data to policymakers, or of its application in the child's learning environment (Walsh, 1991). In discounting the perceptions of children, we hobble ourselves as teachers/researchers, and diminish students' roles in their cognitive, social, and moral development. Denial of the worth of their voices' reflects back to the child, developing a negative and depreciated perception of their competence, communication, and acceptance (Erikson, 1966).

The individuals least questioned, on all matters pedagogic, are the real consumers for whom educators all work, the children. As agents of learning they offer students an interpretation of knowledge, but don't always consider the consequences of what and how they say things in class. What is, at times, neglected is the information teachers offer schoolchildren about ourselves, through the way they act in class, among their peers, and in daily routines within the school community. Teachers present students with lessons, but don't always consider the ways in which wisdom is imparted, or biases reflected in opinions, expressions and attitudes with the children in class (van Manen, 1986). Without

student input, teachers have a poor appreciation of their total environments and will likely be less sensitive or unaware of their social and emotional needs.

When teachers disparage low paying jobs at fast food restaurants and the people who work there, do they consider that some of those workers are the parents and siblings of their students? In class discussions are cultures of people of color defined as backwards, savage, or corrupt? Student input adds resources teachers need to better communicate with children and facilitate their learning.

It seems that many pre-packaged lessons on multiculturalism are generalist in nature, alien to the communities they are meant to serve, and indifferent to their culture. Rarely are the experts consulted members of, or representative of, the school student bodies that will be using the curricular material. This disenfranchisement from their own education seems analogous to a doctor taking patients' pulses by holding someone else's hand. Any assumption that the children are not sophisticated enough to provide useful information ignores the demonstrated complexity of a child's thoughts in play, social exchanges, and in the navigation of their own world (Schwab, 1996 and Zentella, 1997).

In our current environment of high stakes testing, the primary focus of education is on the end results rather than the conditions that impact learning. In American schools today, progress, as demonstrated on standardized tests in reading and math, appears to be the most important product. Social, cultural and emotional development is pushed back, at least until the tests are over. Issues that confound students' learning -- poverty, housing, transiency, ethnicity, language, and race -- and the ways students perceive themselves in the learning environment are rarely central to school board plans or classroom curriculum. Rather than assess children individually based upon their specific needs and achievement, schools instead use standardized tests of generally proscribed knowledge, to measure students' ability to know and learn. Such assessment tools fall short of discovering the students' individual needs or revealing their impediments to learning.

Increasing students' voices in their own learning is an important issue in the learning environment with regards to positions of visibility and authority in the classroom (Delpit, 1995). The

power of authority, its acquisition, and the individual's placement within a culture permeate the classroom. Students, as the least powerful members of the classroom community, internalize the values of the power structure and struggle to find a place within its framework (Freire 1998). Those with power are least able to see their privileges while those without power are, generally, most aware of its existence. Thus, teachers who see themselves as egalitarian and working for the students' best interests may be completely at odds with the children's cultures or notions of their learning priorities (Delpit, 1995). Teachers may rigidly control their classrooms or share power and still act as gatekeepers, dispensing authority and power.

Student perspectives must be a critical element in curriculum design for a democratic society. Democracy relies on individual free expression and the inclusion of diverse talents and perspectives (Dewey, 1916). When we exclude voices from our dialogue on pedagogic issues we diminish the resources and talents through which we can achieve improvement. We also inhibit participation in our democracy by many who would enrich our culture.

Video documentary and the voices of African-American students

One way classroom teachers have addressed the problems we have outlined in these pages--the disconnection between school and students' cultural experiences, the unacknowledged non-school curriculum, and the absence of student voice found in many urban classrooms--is through the use of student-made video productions. Student videos enable young people to investigate topics that are important to them, and to communicate their views in insightful and authentic ways (Saunders, 1997). Producing videos for real audiences can also help students come to understand their own power as communicators of ideas (Bazalgette, 1990, cited in Hart, 1991). In addition, video-making challenges the traditional teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher is viewed as the sole source of knowledge and students are merely consumers. Ladson-Billings (2001) has noted the importance of student knowledge production in any pedagogy that aims to be culturally relevant. With student-created videos, young people can take on the roles of meaning-makers and producers of knowledge, and move from a

passive to a more active role in their own learning. By creating their own media products, students may also begin to question the messages served up to them by traditional media outlets. Stuart Hall, as quoted in Grahame (1991), explains:

> ...it is important to get people into producing their own images because....they can then contrast the images they produce of themselves against the dominant images which they are offered, and so they know that social communication is a matter of conflict between alternative readings of society. (p. 149)

Through the Eyes of the Future: ACT Students Take a Glance at West Garfield Park (1999) is an 18-minute documentary video that was produced by two sophomore humanities classes at the Academy of Communication and Technology Charter School on Chicago's west side. Countering and challenging the image of black youth that is often put forth by mainstream media, *Through the Eyes of the Future* is an example of the sort of "alternative reading of society" of which Stuart Hall speaks. In the video, African American students examine the community that surrounds their school, focusing on four key issues: racism, police brutality, economic isolation, and gentrification. Through poetry, discussions, and voice-over narration, the young people articulate their opinions on these issues and how they are impacted by them. Students also interview several adult residents of West Garfield Park in order to include their perspectives, and take the video camera into the neighborhood to shoot scenes of community life (including one scene involving an African American youth being harassed by police).

The video begins with a series of questions, all centered around a single idea: What is it that makes a community a community? The student videographers then proceed to explore this question more fully, balancing signs of distress and blight in the neighborhood with signals of hope and possibility. One narrator, wondering about the reasons for the community's continuing problems, asks, "Is it [because of] the people who aren't willing to take a stand, or [is it] the people who have taken a stand but haven't been heard?" It is clear that the students who produced *Through the Eyes of the Future* are making their stand, and that they fully expect others to hear them.

The non-school curriculum is brought into sharp focus throughout the documentary, as are the cultural (and class-based) experiences of ACT students. Students tells stories of being hounded by

security officers in department stores, being hassled by neighborhood police, and worrying that "urban removal" will leave them homeless or displaced. Power and racism are recurring themes. One young man says he believes Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan is a frequent target of white ridicule because Farrakhan is a powerful black man "talkin' truth," and "people don't like that." A girl in the same discussion comments, "I think it's still slavery, just without the shackles. White people still in power. And it's half our fault, 'cause the little freedom they do give us, we don't take advantage of it."

West Garfield Park's economic woes are also a major theme in the video. Students tell of parents working long hours for little pay, and shots of abandoned stores and boarded-up restaurants are featured prominently. George Morris, a community activist, explains to a student interviewer that dollars spent in the neighborhood leave quickly because too few businesses are community-owned. This is followed by an interesting and lively discussion about the history and transformation of the word "ghetto," and whether the word is appropriate as a descriptor for people who act "ignorant." After several students cite examples of "ghetto" jokes ("You know you're ghetto when roaches come out when company comes"), one girl objects to the characterization of poor people as "ghetto." "Poor people can be the most civilized and kind people," she says, "they just don't have any money. That don't mean they're 'ghetto.' They're not ignorant."

The teacher who sponsored *Through the Eyes of the Future* took advantage of the funds of knowledge present in her students' communities to enhance their learning in the areas of social sciences, language arts, communications, and technology. She made space in the classroom, within her "formal" curriculum, for her students' voices to be heard. And she made connections between school knowledge and cultural experience, acknowledging the dual metaphor of curriculum as window and mirror (McIntosh & Style, 1999), the simultaneous looking out onto unknown worlds and reflecting back on one's own.

In the process, this teacher undoubtedly gained new insight on some of the critical issues facing her students. As is typical of qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized; however, the video has a powerful message to all educators/researchers: there are critical issues that affect children outside of the classroom that are relevant inside of the classroom, and connections can indeed be forged between the

two. Watching this provocative student work prompted us to wonder about additional possibilities that documentary video might present for educational researchers, and to begin planning a video documentary project of our own.

Video documentary as an alternative form of research

Qualitative research is concerned primarily with meaning (Glesne, 1999). It seeks not to prescribe or predict, but to describe, interpret, and understand. Whereas quantitative research assumes a positivist orientation, wherein "a fixed, measurable reality exists external to people," qualitative research is interpretive in nature, and "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing" (p. 5). To comprehend the nature of these constructed realities, qualitative researchers "regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 5). In other words, they seek to better understand the meaning people give to their experiences. Qualitative methods call for the extensive observation, exploration, and interpretation of some phenomenon of interest. It is work that William Ayers (2000) has said is more like a search than *re*-search.

Investigators choose to use qualitative methods for a variety of reasons. Creswell (1998) outlines eight reasons that an individual might decide to undertake a qualitative study, which include the nature of the research question (a "how" or "what" question rather than a "why"); the need to present an up-close, detailed view of a topic; the desire to study individuals in their natural setting; the preference to present information in a literary style; and an interest in taking on the role of active learner, "who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants" (p. 18). In recent years, increasing numbers of educational researchers have utilized qualitative approaches in their studies, and qualitative methods have gradually gained more acceptance and legitimacy in the educational research community. Ethnographic designs, case studies, biographies, and narratives--among

other qualitative approaches--are now employed with frequency in studies of schools and schooling (Jaeger, 1997).

Despite this growing acceptance of qualitative inquiry, a debate has persisted over the appropriateness of non-academic forms of writing, and other artistic renditions, as research. Can fictional writing, such as a novel, be considered research? How about theater, visual art, film, or video? Kilbourn (1999) asserts that fiction, so long as it contains the qualities we expect of a thesis, evidences self-conscious method, and coheres as a whole, should be acceptable to satisfy the doctoral thesis requirement. More generally, Eisner (1995), citing examples from literary genres and film, suggests that too hard a line is drawn between what is viewed as research and what isn't, pointing out that even "scientific" inquiry often contains artistic qualities. And Barone and Eisner (1997) argue persuasively for a place at the educational research table for arts-based inquiry, including non-written forms of expression.

In their defense of arts-based inquiry, Barone and Eisner (1997) focus most of their attention on written prose, but this is not, they point out, because other forms of expression are less valuable as research--it is because existing examples of them are scarce. The authors encourage us to broaden our definition of what counts as research, pointing out that "neither language nor number have a monopoly on the means by which humans represent what they have come to know" (p. 90). Our experience of the world, Barone and Eisner suggest, is "multisensory," and it follows that inquiry into that lived experience should reflect its multisensory nature. Media such as video and film are interpretive and evocative, and allow their audiences to understand and make meaning in ways that are not possible with literal language. If, as Barone and Eisner suggest, the primary aim of educational research is to further understanding so that educational practice can be improved, is it not possible that a film or video that furthers such understanding be considered research?

It is our position that video documentaries provide an accessible forum for exploring critical issues in education, and that artfully produced documentaries that increase our understanding of

educational phenomena should be considered research. As technology has made high-quality video recording simpler, even for those with limited technical backgrounds, its potential value to the research community has become greater. Eisner (1998) has acknowledged the persistent separation that exists between the work of educational researchers, who publish in technical, densely worded, narrowly circulated journals, and practitioners, whose focus is often limited to their day-to-day classroom realities and who largely view researchers as "strangers in their midst" (p. 171). The utilization of video as a means of documentation could help bridge this gap between the work of researchers and teachers. It could serve as a "translation" medium in the age-old theory/practice divide, helping to bring theoretical ideas into the realm of "common sense" and making research come alive for classroom teachers.

In addition, video provides a powerful tool for giving voice to marginalized members of the community and for informing the public about critical issues faced by today's youth (Saunders, 1997). Because of its potential to move and provoke audiences emotionally as well as intellectually, video documentary also seems an ideal medium for research that aims to serve an advocacy function, for inquiry that is empowering to its participants. Rappaport (1990), cited in Ristock and Pennell (1996), describes research that empowers as that which is "committed to identifying, facilitating or creating contexts in which heretofore silent and isolated people, those who are 'outsiders' in various settings, organizations and communities, gain understanding, voice and influence over decisions that affect their lives" (p. 2). This is research done not solely for research's sake, to further a career, to ensure tenure, to present at a conference, or to impress one's peers in the academy, but research that is in and of the world, research that makes a difference, research that matters. It is this sort of inquiry that we, as current and former classroom teachers, believe is of vital importance in the field of education.

Where do we go from here?

In a future study, we will develop a video documentary project that will attempt to give voice to students and allow them to share their life and learning experiences with those who contribute to the

shaping of their educational pursuits--i.e., teachers, administrators, and researchers. From the students' own words, we will learn about how they view the curriculum, how it is taught, and their perceptions of its intended purpose. Through examining the environments of the students and their interactions within them (home, school, and community), we hope to see more clearly the disconnections and discontinuity between their school and community experiences.

The research methodology for our video documentary project will be qualitative and interpretive. The video will focus on two primary participants who are elementary school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural or racial minority groups. These students will be articulate, expressive, and willing to talk about their homes, schools, and communities. Secondary participants (made up of persons in the students' homes, schools, and communities) will also be included. Our research plan is to investigate, through observations and interviews, the students' perceptions of their worlds, the sense they make of their experiences, with a focus on several key issues: What connection, if any, do they perceive between school curricula and their lived cultural experiences? How do they view the in-school and out-of-school curricula? In what ways do they feel their voices are honored or ignored in classrooms? What do "school" and "learning" mean to them? Interviews and footage from the classrooms and communities will be recorded using video camcorders. These recordings, along with field notes, will make up the data for our project.

While the video documentary we plan to produce will not be an ethnography in the strictest sense, it will, as Wolcott (1997) has said, "draw upon ethnographic approaches." Based upon Creswell's (1998) definition of a phenomenological study as one which "describes the meaning or the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51), our research could also be said to contain phenomenological elements. Looked at from another perspective, it could be termed a set of case studies of children of color in Chicago schools. What becomes clear is that these qualitative techniques can be difficult to separate out, and can become quite blurry at the edges. For those reasons, putting a label on

the precise type of study we will be undertaking isn't easy; however, it is our hope that the finished video will, in effect, turn up the volume on the muted voices of students.

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